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THE WIFE OF MAROBIUS

By

Max Ehrmann

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THE WIFE OF MAROBIUS

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BY

MAX EHRMANN

The Wife of Marobius is strongly dramatic and beautifully simple.—**New York Evening Mail.**

Not often is the secret of a woman's emotional nature revealed as clearly as in this drama of love and passion.—**Pittsburg Press.**

This story is true to-day and forever.—**Seattle Times.**

Max Ehrmann reveals the rich quality of his genius in The Wife of Marobius.—**Milwaukee Wisconsin.**

This is a bold theme. Emotion rises to the intensest pitch, but the poet rises with it, and no false note is struck. . . . . Ehrmann has produced a notable piece of literature.—**Indianapolis News.**

A moving and poignant tragedy, a play that is at once poetic and dramatic.—**Chicago Evening News.**

It is intense and exalted; a play of palpitant power, in which barbaric passion breathes through verse of splendid texture.—**Pittsburg Gazette Times.**

It is a study of sensuous beauty, warm with life and movement, and with a genuine feeling for the tears of things expressed in music woven out of shadow and the reverses of the spirit. It has beauty and life.—**Boston Transcript.**

In The Wife of Marobius this gifted author displays his genius in a new and brilliant light. There is in the play a dignity of style, a notable eloquence of expression, and a dramatic intensity that are tremendously compelling.—**Buffalo Courier.**

It is marked with passion and intensity; and is powerfully dramatic.—**San Francisco Bulletin.**

How I should love to play it! Really it is full of great, great chances.—**William Faversham.**

Here are a fine and sure sense of technique, a subtle understanding of the feminine mind, and a noble feeling for beauty at once sensuous and moral. —**The Drama.**

THE
WIFE OF MAROBIUS

A PLAY

BY

MAX EHRMANN

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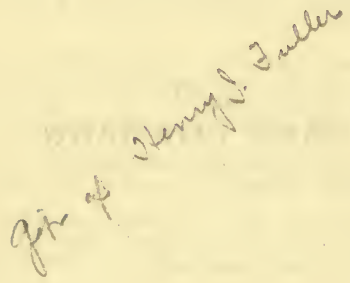

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THE WIFE OF MAROBIUS

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PERSONS

MAROBIUS, a Roman general.
CLODIA, his wife.
LYDIA, an old nurse.

TIME: 58 B. C.

The Wife of Marobius

PLACE: An antechamber to CLODIA'S *bedroom in the house of* MAROBIUS *at Rome. Around the walls hang seven lamps of gold. The ceiling is traversed by beams bound with bands of silver and gold. On each side of the room stands a marble pillar from which project two candlesticks of seven arches. At back there is a window screened by bronze shutters, beneath and at the sides of which the wall is embedded with precious stones, pearl, jade and onyx. Against part of the back wall hangs gold woven tapestry. A citrus table stands in the centre of the room; and a couch at right. There is a door at left and a door at right. On the wall near the door at left is attached a cluster of Greek and Barbarian weapons, daggers, spears, and swords. From the ceiling hangs a small bell of hammered gold. The furnishings glitter in the light of the two burning lamps.* CLODIA *is walking across the room. It is past midnight.*

[*Enter* LYDIA]

LYDIA

I thought that you would be asleep ere now.

CLODIA

I tried to sleep, but tossed and tossed again.

LYDIA

You should lie still and sleep will come. The night
Is still, the house is still, but we yet stir.

CLODIA

To me the night is full of ugly noise;
You say the night is still?

LYDIA

No sound at all,
Save now and then a wind that moves the leaves.

CLODIA

Then must the noise be in myself.

LYDIA

Perhaps.

CLODIA

I am all tumult like a waterfall.

LYDIA

You should lie still and sleep will come ere
long,
Sleep is so strange a thing.

CLODIA

Is it so strange?
I think the moving night is far more strange.
To you it has no motion and no sound;
To me it is a noisy, crowded street;
A city full of misty, moving shapes.

LYDIA

These things are in yourself. Be still awhile,
And you shall see how, like a loving nurse,
Sweet sleep will soothe and kiss your tired eyes.

CLODIA

[*Taking a seat near the table*]
Last night I had a dream that was like death,
So terrible was the fear it wrought in me.
I thought I lay in there beside my husband
[*Pointing to the right*]
And slept, as was my joy in other times.
A hand plucked at my gown and wakened me;
And with my eyes wide open I beheld
My husband lying headless by my side.
I thought I tried to move and cry aloud,
Yet could do naught but look upon his corpse.
Then it seemed we lay out in the garden,
Still side by side, his headless form and I;
And plainly could I hear his moaning voice
Come from the grassy earth!

LYDIA

What said the voice?

CLODIA

I could not tell, so inarticulate
The sound, yet anger and a deep despair
Commingled strangely.

LYDIA

Were you much afraid?

CLODIA

A hundred times I died within the dream,
It was as if his head rebelled its fate,
And sought to issue from the grassy earth.
I thought his pallid lips arose at last
And mingled with the leaves of tender green,
Which spat forth yellow flame and hissed the while.
Then came that rolling sea of stormy dream
That drowns all sense of earthly form and color,
A moving world of nothing seen or heard,
Yet moving, swiftly rushing on and on.
When I awoke I should have cried aloud,
But terror held my throat and quenched the sound.

LYDIA

Dear mistress, drive away these darkened thoughts;
For all is still save now and then the wind

That moves the leaves. The night was made
for sleep.
It is the cooling balm of fevered minds.

CLODIA

What meaning can there be in such a dream?
Is it a message from the kinder gods
To give me warning of approaching ill?
Or does some dark corruption in myself
Make sick with fear this helmsman of my
sleep?

LYDIA

No meaning can there be in hapless dreams.

CLODIA

Said you a wind was whining in the trees?

LYDIA

A gentle wind. I cannot hear it now.

CLODIA

There! It is whining in the cypress trees.
[*Goes to the window and looks out*]

LYDIA

Come, come, dear mistress, think such thoughts
no more.
Your eyes are bright as noon, but should be
dull,
That sleep might close them up.

CLODIA

[*Listening at the window*] Hear, Lydia!
It tells some sadden story fraught with pain.
The night awakes the slumbering things of
day.
Perhaps it is the wind now on his round
To wake the trees that babble through their
leaves.
This room is filled with living things by night;
They whisper in my ears, and some cry "hist!"
[*Pointing to the bell suspended from the ceil-
ing*]
And, Lydia, that piece of hammered gold
Has more unending terror in its tongue
Than all the torments of the wicked dead.
How often it has called me forth to shame!

I think each moment it will cry aloud
And send me forth to him, for 'tis the night
That I am wont to barter for my bread.
I am a harlot in my husband's house;
My body does he love but not my soul.
The food I eat is paid for by my flesh.
I cannot live through it another night;
My tongue will cry aloud against my will.

LYDIA

I would it pleased you more.

CLODIA

[*Startled*] What sound is that?

LYDIA

I hear no sound.

CLODIA

I heard it plainly—there!

LYDIA

Perhaps some slave is walking in his room.

CLODIA

Perhaps some slave is walking in his sleep.
No, it is there, up in the gloomy trees—
A flutter as of wings.

LYDIA

I cannot hear.
Perhaps a bird has fallen from his nest.

CLODIA

There are some birds that fly abroad at night
And sing a wailing song as from the tomb.

LYDIA

[*Softly stroking her hair*]
Come, mistress, banish all these darkened thoughts,
And sleep, else dawn will find you pale and weak.

CLODIA

I would stay here and have you talk to me.
Again I hear the noise. O that my mind
Did cease to note each passing breath of sound!

LYDIA

It is some slave that walks within the house.

CLODIA

Go to his room and see if he's within.
If he but sleeps!

LYDIA

[*Surprised*]

Go to the master's room?

CLODIA

Yes, I would know if he is fast asleep.
Then shall I yield myself unto the night;
And you will lie by me, as long ago.

LYDIA

But should he wake and find me spying him?

CLODIA

Invent some answer should he question you.

LYDIA

I cannot think what answer I should make.

CLODIA

Say that you came to fill the lamps with oil.

LYDIA

At such an hour as this?

CLODIA

Or that you thought
You heard him speak, and came to learn his want.

LYDIA

Attendants lie almost beside his bed.

CLODIA

Or say you lost your way. The night is dark.

LYDIA

No answer will I form, but go at once,
That you may sleep and be yourself again.

CLODIA

See, I would sacrifice you, Lydia—
Good Lydia, so much am I distraught.

LYDIA

And should he wake and punish me with words,
Or think I am some thief come in the night,
I shall not fear, so kind is he to me.

[LYDIA *goes off at left.* CLODIA *lights more lamps. There is a noise as if something had fallen. Presently* LYDIA *reënters*]

CLODIA

What sound was that? He woke and looked on you?

LYDIA

While groping in the dark I fell.

CLODIA

Speak, speak!
You saw him in his bed?

LYDIA

I saw him not.

CLODIA

You looked inside his room?

LYDIA

He was not there.

CLODIA

Then wanders he still somewhere in the night,
Or lounges drinking at some festive board.
Whose feast is it to-night?

LYDIA

I know of none.
And yet I heard one whispered of to-day.

CLODIA

Is there an undertone of whispers here?

LYDIA

Yes, but rebellion makes no sound in it.
Why all the lamps aglow in dead of night?

CLODIA

That there may be no visions in the room,
No uninvited guests to torment me.

LYDIA

Come, come, must I grow stern with you and
chide,
As when a child you lay within my arms?
Long has the hour of early sleep passed by,
But we yet stir with all our lamps aglow.

CLODIA

I cannot rest till he's within and sleeps.
[*Walks nervously up and down the room*]

LYDIA

And discontent looks ill upon your face,
Like some rank weed spread o'er a bed of
roses.
O Clodia, come, be my child again;
And hear my words with faith, as long ago.
The stories that I told you on my knee
Have all come true, as by some magic hand.
This is a house of glitter and of dreams,
And you the mistress of this shining land,
Where noonday may be kindled in the night,
So bright the lustre of these lamps of gold.

And you are decked as if some youthful god
Had wed you in the morning of the world.
Yet growing discontent eats at your breast,
And fear and loathing mingle in your soul.
See, I am stern with you.

CLODIA

[*Kissing her on the forehead*] And I forgive.

LYDIA

I now remember when he came for you,
And how I thought that you must part from me,
When lo! he packed me up and laughing said
Our nests unharmed should still be side by side.
So did he wed us both.

CLODIA

Hark! Heard you that—
Out there?

LYDIA

I nothing heard but our own words.

CLODIA

The cypress trees are crying out again.
[*Goes to the window and looks out*]
How strange the dark! Come here and see
how strange.
What flecks of light are these that dot the
sky?

LYDIA

It is the moonlight breaking through the clouds.

CLODIA

I would the dawn were here and I had slept.

LYDIA

[*Pointing to the ceiling*]
He'll sound the bell if he desires you.
Are you not young and lithe and full of life?
'Tis time you bloomed, it is your early sum-
mer.
Now look on me, how old and brown I am.
But once I, too, was young and loved and
lived.
And when the moon shines on a summer night,

I wish I could turn back the wheel of time,
Awake the withered leaves of summers gone,
And listen to sweet whispers in my ear.
Sometimes I dream that I am young again,
And wake and weep to find that I but dreamed.
O, I would heed the sound that sent me forth
To him my eager husband——

CLODIA

Pray forbear.

[*A noise is heard*]
Was that an outer door?

LYDIA

I think it was.

[*Listening at door at right*]
The master is within his house at last.

CLODIA

[*Nervously*]
If, Lydia, by chance the bell should fall,
Or were its tongue drawn out, it could not sound . . .
See how its coat of gold needs burnishing,

The dust of many days lies on its back.
Can you not improvise an accident,
And dash it down, and say 'twas yesterday,
And you forgot to make report of it?

LYDIA

Good mistress, yield yourself no more to fear;
The moments pass and there is silence still;
And soon we two shall softly fall asleep.
Did you not say that I should lie by you,
As long ago?

CLODIA

Yes, I have need of you,
To drive away the shapes that pluck at me.

LYDIA

Just so it was when you were but a child
And had o'er-played, all fitful was your sleep;
Or when a little glutton you had been,
And stole the sweets that were forbidden you.
O would that we could live it all again!

CLODIA

'Tis echoed in my heart a thousand times.
I would give all the woman that I am
To see once more the clouds as they appeared
In that old time, and kiss the perfumed air
That tossed my tresses in a hundred ways.
But now I walk in fear as one condemned.
O nurse—how strange that old name sounds!

LYDIA

To me
There is no sweeter name.

CLODIA

[*Seating herself again*] In that old garden
Of painted dreams my childhood left its soul.
Sometimes the child I was comes back to me,
And I stretch forth my arms to hold it fast.
For one brief moment all the world is changed:
The lure of twilight shadows in the evening,
The pallid gold of summer moons long past,
Again enchant me with forgotten peace.

LYDIA

Not so long past, for you are still a child,
And I shall wake you with my hand to-night,
If some unwholesome dream distress your sleep.

CLODIA

O that your kindly touch might waken me
From dreams that look into my open eyes!

LYDIA

Good mistress, come, let us to bed.

CLODIA

Not yet,
Some moments still must pass ere we lie down.

LYDIA

Your voice is charged again with saddened tones,
A moment since it had a sweeter sound.

CLODIA

You led me o'er the paths of yesterday,

And memory joined my childish hand to yours;
I saw the sky rest on a sleeping hill,
And heard the murmur of the meadow winds,
It was my dawn, my springtime morning hour.

LYDIA

Ah! now your voice is sweet again. Good child——

[*The bell of hammered gold upon the ceiling faintly rings.* LYDIA *goes toward the right*]

CLODIA

[*Arises, startled*]
Wait! You need not hasten.

LYDIA

I hasten not,

[LYDIA *enters the room on the right, and returns at once with a sleeping-gown*]

LYDIA

[*Unbuttoning the gown*]
How chill these pearls must feel against the flesh!

More pale are they than lilies of the field,
More pale than is this dress of woven air—
This dress of lawful pleasure and of dream.
'Tis ready now

CLODIA

I will not put it on.

LYDIA

Immodest would it be to go without.
See how the gold threads sparkle in the light,
And hear the whisper of the shining folds.
These gold threads dazzle me.

CLODIA

They sicken me.

LYDIA

[*Holding up the gown*]
It waits for you to give it form and life.

CLODIA

It is a shroud that brings decay and death.

LYDIA

Nay, say not so. Upon your face a rose
Breaks into bloom and paints your tender
cheek.

CLODIA

It is the rose of shame and not desire.

LYDIA

The time goes quickly by. He waits for you.

CLODIA

I will not put it on.

LYDIA

In all the world
It is the honored custom and the law.

CLODIA

[*Boldly*]
Too often have I sacrificed myself
Upon the altar of the hated law,
Which bids me eat the fruit that sickens me,
Denies me drink when I am much athirst.
But now I think there is another law,

Wrought not by men, but by immortal gods,
Which bids me be myself and walk erect.

Lydia

You are a ruler in this house of gold,
Set up by him upon this mighty throne.

Clodia

I am a slave within this house of flesh.

Lydia

My child, you vex yourself with sophistry.
The time goes quickly by. He waits for you.

Clodia

Forbear to urge me, for my flesh is weak.

Lydia

He is so good. How can you tarry here?

Clodia

[*Anxiously*]
Go you to him, and say that I am ill,

That I have tossed these hours in sleeplessness.
Do not delay, I bid you go at once.
Good Lydia, you do not understand.
I am now being born again, and come
Afresh into this breathing world. Go, go!

LYDIA

I cannot say in truth that you are ill.

CLODIA

Then say to him I do not come to-night.

LYDIA

That shall I say, and then come back to you—
Bluntly as you have said it now.

CLODIA

Wait, wait!

LYDIA

Then you will go to him?

CLODIA

[*Approaching the door at right*]

No, no, listen!

Some one is passing to and fro outside,
Some one is passing near our door. Or do
I hear the wind up in the cypress trees?
My mind is full of motion and of sound.

LYDIA

'Tis true, some one is coming toward our door.

CLODIA

But now I think the sound grows fainter.

LYDIA

Yes.

CLODIA

I loathe this prowling in the dead of night,
This watching, waiting to collect a debt.

LYDIA

I shall at once to him and give your message.

[*She lays the sleeping-gown over a chair, and goes out at left. Some moments elapse while* CLODIA *quenches the lights until only two are burning. As she goes toward the*

remaining lamps, the left door opens softly and MAROBIUS *enters*]

CLODIA

Oh!

MAROBIUS

[*Standing by the door*]
Do not startle. It is I.

CLODIA

I—you——
You frightened me. I thought 'twas Lydia.
You saw her?

MAROBIUS

Yes, and sent her off to bed.

CLODIA

Delivered she the message that I sent?

MAROBIUS

Sne stammered that you would not come to me.
But see, I come to you!

CLODIA

Whose steps were those
I heard a moment since outside the door?
So stealthily they came and went again,
I thought at first it was the wind at play.

MAROBIUS

I sent to learn if you were still awake.
This room was found aglow with many lights.
Since you come not to me, I come to you,
To feel your light, woman of all women.

CLODIA

[*Aside*]
O had I let in darkness ere he came!

MAROBIUS

[*Still standing by the door*]
Spoke you to me? I understood you not.
Am I unwelcome in your room of gold?

CLODIA

Who shall say "no" to you in your own house?
Here do I live by sufferance of you.

My life is but a moving ornament
Amid these pearl and gold embedded walls.

MAROBIUS

You are too solemn. Pray convert your mood
To cheerfulness. We two are here alone,
No tedious guests to keep us from ourselves.
[*Goes toward her*]
I would infold you now—my wife, my wife!
And feel you close—O, very close to me!
Perpetual dew keeps moist your tender lips,
And were I dead your kiss would waken me.

CLODIA

[*Moving away*]
Wait, wait! not sudden thus, 'tis long ere dawn.
Since early night I seem to hear a sound
Up in the cypress trees—not like the wind;
Yet Lydia supposed it was the wind.
Think you the wind can speak like human lips?

MAROBIUS

Have you not slept?

CLODIA

The whispers in the night
Have kept me wake with their unending noise.

MAROBIUS

As you so quickly move about, I think
I have not seen a deer more lithe than you,
So agile are your limbs, so swift your eyes.
Your hair is full of sleep and full of dream;
It is a sunlit fall of golden water,
A rushing torrent made of liquid gold;
'Tis softer than a midnight summer wind
Upon the hungry lips of eager love;
And when at first I twined it round my face,
I felt the passion of the gods.
[*Goes toward her*]

CLODIA

[*Moving away*]

Wait, wait.

MAROBIUS

You are a flower that blooms in quiet night,
So fragrant that it thrills me through.

CLODIA

Wait, wait.
Listen! It is the whispers in the trees,
It is the moaning in the trees out there.

MAROBIUS

'Tis but the wind that tosses up the leaves.

CLODIA

I hear a sound more human-like than wind.

MAROBIUS

[*Goes to the window and looks out*]
Nothing but moving air disturbs the night.
A little bird are you to frighten thus,
A little bird with burnished marble breast.
Come to me, sing your breath into my face;
Your breath like sweetened poison thrills me through.
[*Goes toward her*]

CLODIA

[*Moving away*]
Wait, wait; I still am trembling in my limbs.
First tell me of the feast to-night.

MAROBIUS

The feast!
As stupid as a race won ere 'tis run.
I would forget it and would feast with you.

CLODIA

Pray tell me what was said.

MAROBIUS

[*Sits down*] But stupid things:
One told, with great gusto, an ancient tale
I heard when yet a boy; another, old
With wine and too much food, proclaimed his ills,
A swelling every morning in his legs.
A youth talked much of love and much more drank.
[*Begins to arise*]

CLODIA

No, no; there is much more to tell.

MAROBIUS

Another,

Our fat, complaining guest of yesternight,
Explained in great detail the foods he ate,
The foods he could not eat, in short, the virtues
Of his stomach and the perils of foods.
One ate too much of quince, grew deathly ill,
Was taken home, and laughed at as he went.
All fools they were, more foolish made by wine.

CLODIA

Was there no noble thought expressed?

MAROBIUS

Not one.
Yet I am little judge of noble thoughts.
My eyes are better trained than is my mind;
And when they look on you they see naught else,
The world is strangely dimmed as if 'twould rain.
Why are your lips so red, your flesh so white—
Whiter than lilies grown beneath a glass—
Whiter than marble brought from Africa?

CLODIA

Always of my body, but not my soul
You speak.

MAROBIUS

It is a sapling laurel tree,
And I a stormy wind that bends it down.
Your saffron hair is like Assyrian silk,
Like sheets of water that the winds distress.
[*Rises and goes toward her*]

CLODIA

[*Avoiding him*]
Wait, wait; I beg more time.

MAROBIUS

[*Stops*] More time?

CLODIA

More time—
To tell a fearful dream of yesternight.
I am your slave and ask more time.

MAROBIUS

My slave?
Your lips alone dare call you slave of mine.
[*Sits down*]

CLODIA

What meaning can there be in fearful dreams?

MAROBIUS

Saw you some ugly thing that frightened you—
That made you hide your head beneath your wing?
Had I been near I should have wakened you,
And held you in my arms.

CLODIA

You were by me.

MAROBIUS

I? Yesternight?

CLODIA

I saw you in my dream.

MAROBIUS

[*Going toward her*]
No ugly thing shall frighten you to-night,
For I, close by, will touch you with my hand,
And kiss the velvet softness of your throat.

CLODIA

[*Moving away*]
Wait, wait!

MAROBIUS

[*Following her step by step*]
Your hair shall I twine round my face,
And breathe the perfume of your breath.

CLODIA

No, no!

MAROBIUS

And crush you in my arms against myself,
Till both of us shall live as one.

CLODIA

No, no!

MAROBIUS

Is it pursuit that thrills your heart with joy?
And must I catch you ere I feel your warmth?
If you were hid within a darkened house,
The perfume of your flesh would cry to me.
Or were you lost, so great is my desire
That I could find you in a sunless world.

Clodia

O, do not touch me lest I cry aloud!

Marobius

[*Stops*]
You gods, I waken! You repulse me?

Clodia

Yes.

Marobius

I am a fire from which you flee in dread?

Clodia

I fear the flaming love you bear my body.

Marobius

Woman of all women, you repulse me!
Within I stagger as a wounded deer.
And yet I think half-hearted that some trick
Your words have played—some trick of sound, perchance,
[*Goes toward her*]
That turns their meaning round. You steal away!

[*Stops*]
I am put off, condemned, pronounced unclean.
Behold my hands! My touch is venomous.
I am a leper found beneath your bed,
My breath more poison than the hemlock's juice;
I am a deadly drink of stagnant water,
The green covering of a pool of ooze.
Where my lips press a yellow scar is left,
As if the juice of upas trickled there.
My image sparkles in your frightened eyes,
A loathèd thing with foul and festered form.
Who lies abed with me shall rot alive.

CLODIA

No, no! Your form is noble like a god's,
And pure as limpid water in the sun.

MAROBIUS

I am a slimy asp found in your bed.
You seek to soothe the wound you have just made,
And mock me with your trembling lips.

CLODIA

No, no;
I only fear the love you bear my body.

MAROBIUS

My touch would sting you as a viper's tongue.

CLODIA

It would but chill me through. O, sadden not!
I am an evil wind–

MAROBIUS

[*Sinking into a chair*]

I am not sad;
Subdued am I, bowed down, and thoughtful grown.
Barbarian spears have cruelly rent my flesh,
But this sword of yours has a keener edge.
My life arises through the mist of years,
And perished memories look on me again.
A world of fancies was my boyish world,
And love was sky and earth and wind and wood.

Love stirred ambition in my youthful breast,
And sent me forth to conquest and to gain.
A thousand youthful women have I seen
Who with their eyes bade me to lead them forth.
Barbarian maidens in Albanian lands,
With dreadful fear consumed, fell on my breast,
Maidens fresh and fair as springtime morning,
Fragrant, yielding as a violet blooming,
Iberian women-slaves of tender age,
With amber hair, Judean maidens crowned
With waving locks of midnight ebony,
And ruby-laden mistresses of kings,
Were as a bed of roses to be plucked.
Yet I kept myself for you.

Clodia

Why for me?

Marobius

Because the gods have formed you like a goddess;

Your flesh is whiter than the polished marble
The Greeks have made to glow with life. I knew
You in my dreams before I saw your face.

CLODIA

Always your eyes are fixed upon my body.
I fear the flaming love you bear my body.

MAROBIUS

A thousand dreadful battles have I fought,
And lain in swamps by the Hyrcanian Sea,
By deadly scorpions visited at night.
Thus gathered I the glitter of this house.
These jewel-embellished lamps of beaten gold
Made bright the enamored evenings of a king.
Yon seven-fingered candlesticks of bronze
Burned in a temple at Jerusalem.
Sweet dreams of love upbore me on the night
I swam a moaning sea of poisoned spears
To bring this tapestry that's stiff with gold.
The grass of spring is not more tender green
Than is the jade embedded in these walls;

Nor autumn leaves more yellow than the topaz.
See how the envious pearls, that sparkle not,
Make solemn faces at the shining stones.
That row of sapphire, soft as summer skies,
Lay on a youthful princess' snow-white breast.
All this I brought for you.

CLODIA

To buy my body,
The food and drink your gourmand passion craves.

MAROBIUS

To please the heart of her I saw in dreams,
Who now repulses me. That citrus table,
Your snow-white fingers now are trembling on,
Came o'er the seas from Africa for you.
[*She lifts her hand from the table*]
Yon daggers, swords, and spears I bought with blood;
Each one I wrenched from out the hand of death.
I gave them you. They were my choicest gift.
The favorite maiden of the King of Pontus
Has worn that diamond that adorns your hair.

'Tis like a dewdrop on a saffron rose.
[*She takes the diamond from her hair and lays it on the table*]
That slender thread of scarlet pearls you wear
Has felt the warmth of fair Statonice's throat.
In all of Rome there is none like to it.
Once in a hundred years, I have been told,
The miser sea gives up a scarlet pearl.
[*She takes the pearls from her throat*]
Have I denied you aught?

CLODIA

No, by the gods,
That have you not. With gold and bronze and pearl,
Well have you paid me o'er and o'er again
For every inch of my defenceless self.
By all the written laws I am your wife;
And being such, I am a loathèd thing.
By signs and sounds of bells you summon me.
Submission takes the place of love's reward.
It is a world of flesh in which we live.
My yearning soul you have not sought to buy.
I would have given it for love alone.

MAROBIUS

Do I not love you?

CLODIA

You love my body.
You love the pleasure that I give to you.
When you are calm you have no need of me;
And day and night I meditate alone.
Then in a frenzied heat you come to me;
And I but live to feed your maddened fire.
I am a sea your storm-winds beat upon.
I am the withered leaves your flames consume.
Your love is fire and straining wind and storm;
Like wine, it wakes to lust your dead desire.
You dazzled me with gold and shining stones,
And led me to this house of lawful shame.
How am I better than the common women
Who sell themselves for shelter and for food?

MAROBIUS

Are you not my wife?

CLODIA

You wed my body,
But not my soul. What law can bind two souls?
What ceremony pompous made with gold
Can lead the heart to go where it will not?
My timid flesh has tarried in this house;
But that in me which lived for love is dead.
You, master, maker of my little world,
You sought it not.

MAROBIUS

'Tis late to note this now.

CLODIA

What did I know of life upon that morn
You led me from my father's house, a child.
My nurse, the sky, my poets had taught me dreams.
I thought you loved my soul.

MAROBIUS

I loved your soul?

Can burning lips be cooled upon the soul?
What is this love of things one cannot touch?

CLODIA

O would that I could form it into words
And give it understanding in your mind!
'Tis soft and low and sweet and clamors not.
'Tis like the light of stars in quiet night,
A hush and stillness of the world within.
'Tis bountiful as is the harvest time
With mellow fruit, and yields ere it is asked.
It is like gentle springtime when the earth
Of her own self. unforced, yields up the grass.

MAROBIUS

Your soul then would I wed. Teach me this love.

CLODIA

'Tis learned not in the twinkling of an eye.

MAROBIUS

I will be patient, teach me step by step.

CLODIA

O, I have meditated in the night
When silence almost murmured like a sound!
And gazing long into the lighted sky,
I thought the stars came slowly down to me;
Then upward through the soft and darkened
world
I went with them unto the ends of space.
With you this flight of soul had been divine.

MAROBIUS

I will go through the universe with you.

CLODIA

And often in the night I would you came
With heavy heart that I might comfort you.
I would you told me of some secret grief
And found surcease of sorrow on my breast.
In evening's quiet hour, beneath the trees,
With eagerness I'd listen to your plans;
And we should wander in one world of thought.
When lonely night comes on I'd sleep by you,
So near that I might touch you with my hand.

And children would I bear that have your image;
And you would ache as I in pain brought forth
Sweet roses in the garden of my breast—
Appealing lips that cry and press for drink,
Whose faintest smile makes sweet a bitter world.
My unborn children have I seen at night,
And heard their feeble cries to be brought forth,
That they might know the glory that it is
To live and see the world with human eyes.
At night they whisper in the cypress trees,
And cry aloud to me to be their mother.
But we have murdered them—my little children!

MAROBIUS

You sadden me with grief till now unknown.

CLODIA

I would not pain you, but my heart is hurt.

MAROBIUS

You should have been a mother.

CLODIA

You would not
Forgo your pleasure for a season brief.

MAROBIUS

[*Rising*]
There still is time.

CLODIA

Not till you love my soul.

MAROBIUS

Your words are piercing as a slender sword.

CLODIA

At first I feared you. Now no more I fear,
For sorrow sits upon your heavy soul
And darkens all the chambers of your house.
It will draw me to you again.

MAROBIUS

You will
Not flee from me if I come to you now?
[*Takes her in his arms*]

CLODIA

No, kiss me not until I come to you:
And then we two shall wander through the world;
And you will know the bliss of loving me,
When I shall breathless run into your arms.

MAROBIUS

I would that now your lips were touching mine.
Mine are a burning field and yours a rain,
A famished beggar gazing on a feast.

CLODIA

No, no; not yet; my heart still beats in pain.

MAROBIUS

O, loath am I so soon to let you go!

CLODIA

Love but my soul, the part of me not flesh,
And you shall see my body run to you.

MAROBIUS

The dawn of this new love breaks through my night.

CLODIA

Be patient, not so quickly is it taught;
Yet am I filled with joy that you will learn,
That you will sit with me in night's still hours,
And live with me your life of thought, as mine
Henceforth I live with you. What sound is this
That like sweet music trembles through the night?
[*Faint music is heard*]

MAROBIUS

I bade my servants softly touch the lute
When I had been with you a measured time,
That I, returning, might be cheered by sound.

CLODIA

[*Drawing slowly away from him*]

This is a new caprice your hunger craves.
Yet sweet this whispered music in the night;
It brings some cheer into my heart.

MAROBIUS

[*Seeing her night robe lying on the chair*]
Your robe!
O, put it on before I go, that I
May look on you in all your loveliness!
For one brief moment fill my eyes with light,
For I am stricken blind and see you not.
You are the sun of all my darkened world.
I have been patient and will learn this love
You told me of. See how I plead with you,
Like some vile beggar at your outer door—
I who but yesterday was master here;
I thirst for you; I hunger for your beauty.
My eyes alone will feel you with their sight.
I have known sabre wounds that were a touch
Beside the mortal hurt of all your words.
O, put it on that I forget my wounds!
[*Takes up the gown*]

CLODIA

I bring you only grief. Your plaintive words
Are heavy with their sorrow.

MAROBIUS

Put it on,
And be the goddess of my heart's own world.

CLODIA

I am no goddess, but am still your wife.

MAROBIUS

Put it on, put it on, and bring me cheer!

CLODIA

O, ask me not again, else will I yield!

MAROBIUS

[*Placing the gown on her arm*]
And let me worship you.

CLODIA

I would be loved.

MAROBIUS

It is the breaking dawn of love's new day.
Your wondrous beauty mirrored on my eyes,
I'll wander off to sleep and dream of you.

CLODIA

Will it cheer you to look on me?

MAROBIUS

Yes, yes!

CLODIA

And as the days come on shall we two learn
The bliss of our new love?

MAROBIUS

My teacher, you.

CLODIA

And will you sit by me at eventide?

MAROBIUS

And in the morning twilight kiss your lips,
Subdued by love that first is passionless.

CLODIA

And sometimes in the watches of the night,
We two shall meditate upon the gods,
And think how beautiful it is to live.

MAROBIUS

Yes, yes!

CLODIA

And will you gladly climb with me
The peaceful mountains made of lofty thoughts
That lie serenely in the soul?

MAROBIUS

That too.

CLODIA

Then will I come that you may look on me.
[*She goes off at right, closing the door behind her.* MAROBIUS *relights several of the lamps.* LYDIA *enters at left*]

LYDIA

Master, master!

MAROBIUS

I sent you off to bed.

LYDIA

O master, do not look on her to-night!

MAROBIUS

Have you been listening? Answer me.

LYDIA

I—I——

MAROBIUS

Have you been listening?

LYDIA

Yes—behind the door.
O master, do not look on her to-night!

MAROBIUS

What strange anxiety distresses you?
Am I to bow before a slave's command?

LYDIA

O, do not look on her!

MAROBIUS

Your trembling lips
Give forth an evil sound. Begone!

LYDIA

I go.

MAROBIUS

And bid the music softly start again,
Not long, nor loud—some piece of passionate love;
For I would feel delight through every sense.
You tarry. Shall I cast you out?

LYDIA

No, no.

[LYDIA *goes off at left.* MAROBIUS *lights more lamps. Faint music is heard for a short time. The door at right is open a little*]

CLODIA

[*Within*]
O! I will come if you quench all the lights.

MAROBIUS

[*Quenching some of the lights*]
How can I see if all the lights are quenched?

CLODIA

One lamp gives light enough.

MAROBIUS

One light but blinds.

CLODIA

Then two or three.

MAROBIUS

O come, I cannot wait!

CLODIA

I have no pleasure in this show of me.

MAROBIUS

O come, and be my dawn, and bring me cheer!

CLODIA

You will not lay your hands upon me?

MAROBIUS

No.
But with my eyes I'll touch you everywhere.
[CLODIA *enters clad in the sleeping-robe. She stands by the door with eyes cast down*]

MAROBIUS

You make the earth beautiful.

CLODIA

I am glad.

MAROBIUS

I think till now I never looked on you.
What amorous god made you to glow with light,
Encircled by this dress of woven air!
You are a lamp set in a silken shade,
A radiant star set in a shining vale.

CLODIA

None of these things am I save in your thought.
If there is lustre, 'tis these precious stones
And threads of gold; I only wear the dress.
[*Looking up, startled*]
Your eyes are glaring like a fretted beast's.

MAROBIUS

[*Going toward her*]
My eyes could find you in a sea of mist.
Around your body hovers perfumed air,
As if the odorous bath had not yet dried.

CLODIA

[*Moving away*]
You said you would not lay your hands on me.

MAROBIUS

A thousand fathoms of the deepest sea
Are not as deep as are your liquid eyes.

CLODIA

[*Weeping*]
No, no; I have done wrong to lure you thus!

MAROBIUS

[*Seizing her in his arms*]
And when you weep I yearn for you the more;
Therefore, I make you weep to spur me on.

CLODIA

[*Struggling*]
I shall cry out!

MAROBIUS

My fingers sting with joy.
Your touch is cooling like a running stream.
This brief embrace will do no hurt to you;
It cools me who am burning like a flame.

CLODIA

No, no—your promise—stand away from me!

MAROBIUS

You cannot put me off, I hold you fast.
See how my lips come near to yours.

CLODIA

No, no!

MAROBIUS

They are athirst to drink your beauty.

CLODIA

No!

MAROBIUS

[*Kissing her*]
I never loved you till this hour.

CLODIA

Stand off!

MAROBIUS

[*Kissing her again*]
The more you struggle the more I love you.

CLODIA

I shall shriek out!

MAROBIUS

[*Drawing her to right, toward her chamber door*]

I cannot let you go;
For every drop of blood within my veins
Cries out for you, and will not yield you up.

CLODIA

No, no, forbear! Your passion maddens you!

MAROBIUS

I burn for you.

CLODIA

You know not what you do;
Your fingers sink into my flesh! [*Calls*] Lydia!
Your eyes dart flame. O stay, think! Lydia!
[*Smothering her voice with his lips, he draws her into her chamber. As she passes the door, endeavoring to stay herself, her hand touches the cluster of weapons hanging on the wall. She cleaves to one of these as he draws her through the door*]

MAROBIUS

[*Within, amid cries*]
Your beauty cools my burning lips. Be still!
I'll drink you, crush you, feel your warmth on me.
I cannot let you go. Be still, be still,
Else will I tear your flesh and make you bleed.

You are my wife; my wife shall be my wife!
[*There is a loud cry within, then silence.* CLODIA, *white and trembling, reënters, and* LYDIA *enters from the opposite side*]

LYDIA

What noise? I thought I heard some one cry out.
There's blood upon your wrist!

CLODIA

[*Whispering*] I scratched myself.
Speak not so loud lest you wake up the house.

LYDIA

The master—where is he—asleep?

CLODIA

Asleep.
Bring me my sable robe.

LYDIA

At such an hour?
'Tis not yet dawn.

CLODIA

We two are going home.
Do quickly what I bid.

LYDIA

Ere he awakes?

CLODIA

[*Gazing fixedly at the door at left*]
He will awake. I see him coming. Go!

LYDIA

I do not see him—where?

CLODIA

[*Frantically*]
My robe—go quickly!
There—there, his eyes, his voice—you hear him?

LYDIA

No.

CLODIA

He murmurs—hear! He murmurs in his sleep.
His lips are moving—see!

LYDIA

[*Caressing her*] I see no one.
You dream again. Be still, else will he wake.
He sleeps so soundly now.

CLODIA

He soundly sleeps.
My mind is full of fancies. Fetch my robe!
What noise was that out there—out there?

LYDIA

The wind.

CLODIA

It sounded like a noise from human lips.
Hear—hear the voices; all the house is roused!
I hear a rush of maddened slaves.

LYDIA

Be calm,
The house is still.

CLODIA

Run, Lydia, run, run!
Make clear the passage, beat them back, go, go!
My robe—run quickly—fetch my robe!

LYDIA

[*Hurries off at right*]

I go.

CLODIA

[*Calling wildly after her*]

Bring slaves—bring litter-slaves to bear us hence . . . .

[*Sinks to the floor*]

[MAROBIUS, *bleeding, raises himself in the doorway at left. He walks falteringly to where* CLODIA *lies, takes her up in his arms. and lays her gently on the couch*]

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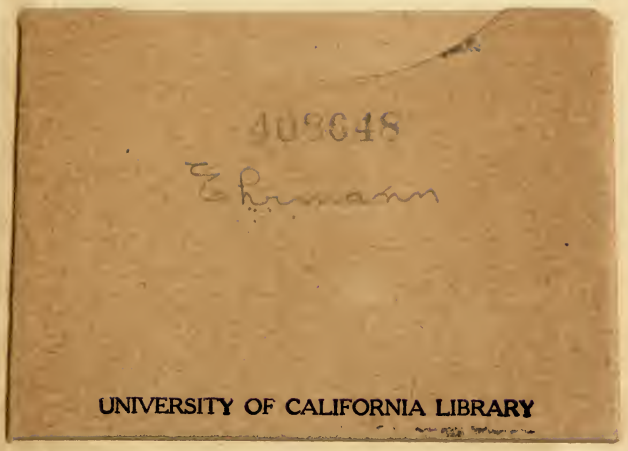
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